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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000341

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY MINSK SENDS

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SUBJECT: U.S. EMBASSY MINSK -- THE POWER OF ONE

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Classified By: A/DCM Louis J. Crishock, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) On April 30, together with nine colleagues, I was declared "persona non grata" and given seventy-two hours to depart Belarus (reftel). The days since my departure have afforded me an opportunity to reflect on my tour and on some policy and management decisions that proved critical to our mission's success.

The Power of One -- Priorities

12. (C) More than seventy years of Bolshevism and fourteen years of the Lukashenko dictatorship have left Belarus a knot of problems, from Chernobyl-contaminated zones to an unreformed economy, from energy dependency to declining population. While each of these problems shapes part of the Belarusian reality, wise leadership -- both in the Department and at post -- has recognized that our relations with Belarus must be defined by just one parameter: Belarus' progress (or regress) in human rights and democracy. This in no way minimizes the significance of the remaining issues, but instead is a sign of our American conviction that, when governed justly and democratically, the people of Belarus will be in the best position to address these political, social and economic ills.

13. (C) Human rights and democracy are our priority for Belarus and recent strategic planning exercises -- like the 2006 interagency-approved Consolidated Assistance Strategy (CAS), and the FY 2009 and FY 2010 Mission Strategic Plans bear this out. This clarity of focus was an invaluable asset to Embassy Minsk, both in policy implementation and as a management tool.

Clarity

14. (C) Through consistent advocacy for the release of political prisoners and for basic civil rights like freedom of speech and assembly, the Embassy made it clear to the regime that our relationship was not an "a la carte" menu. Cooperation on any of a host of issues would not absolve it from numerous stolen elections, the disappearances of prominent critics and a history of unjust imprisonment. Improved relations were possible, and even after the most recent events remain possible, but the release of all political prisoners and demonstrable human rights progress would be the key to such amelioration.

Mission, Morale, Management

15. (C) Clarity of message was perhaps as important for management as it was for policy implementation, though. From Consular to Political/Econ, from Management to AID and Public Affairs, all Embassy Minsk staff knew that post had one mission -- in the words of the CAS "robust democracy promotion" -- and each was encouraged to see his or her work in this context. This sense of mission led to consistently high morale in spite of unrelenting, intrusive pressure from the regime.

16. (C) As the regime made unprecedented calls for reductions in diplomatic staff, clarity of message and sense of mission took on even greater significance. When our diplomatic presence went from 35 to 15 and finally to 5, section heads (and newly-minted acting section heads) were not forced to choose between a wealth of issues, but were faced with a much simpler task -- maintaining focus on our one goal, and reallocating resources accordingly.

The Power of One -- Presence

17. (C) As scarce human resources were shifted, emphasis remained on public statements of solidarity with political prisoners and those brave enough to express themselves through public assembly. Contacts consistently remarked that the presence of a U.S. diplomat at a trial represented a form of protection, an assurance that a superpower found found their plight worthy of consideration. In a perfect example of transformational diplomacy, the

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presence of one diplomat can lead a policeman to question if his brutality will go unpunished, or can lead a judge to wonder if reading today's dictated sentence might result in a travel ban. Most importantly, it reminds brave democrats that they are not alone -- a task worthy of a lifetime.

Words of Thanks

18. (SBU) I would be remiss if I failed to seize this opportunity to thank those who have supported Embassy Minsk, especially in these last tumultuous days. Thanks go to the entire Department, especially the EUR Bureau, the M family, and EUR/UMB for their constant support. Moreover, the assistance and concern shown by Ambassador John Cloud and his Embassy Vilnius team have been a great comfort both to Embassy Minsk as a whole, and especially to staff who, like me, were declared "persona non grata." Their response to a crisis faced by Foreign Service colleagues is in the greatest tradition of our profession. I am thankful to Embassy Minsk's brave local staff, who face constant pressure and even threats of jail for treason for doing nothing more than a day's work. A free Belarus will one day note their contributions with pride. Finally, I would like to personally thank Ambassador Karen Stewart and DCM Jonathan Moore. Their faith and trust in me gave me the opportunity to serve the American people in Minsk and their leadership, example, and the example of all of my Foreign Service colleagues in Minsk, encouraged me to make that service count. I will remain long in their debt.

MOORE
CLOUD